

THE ROAD HERE

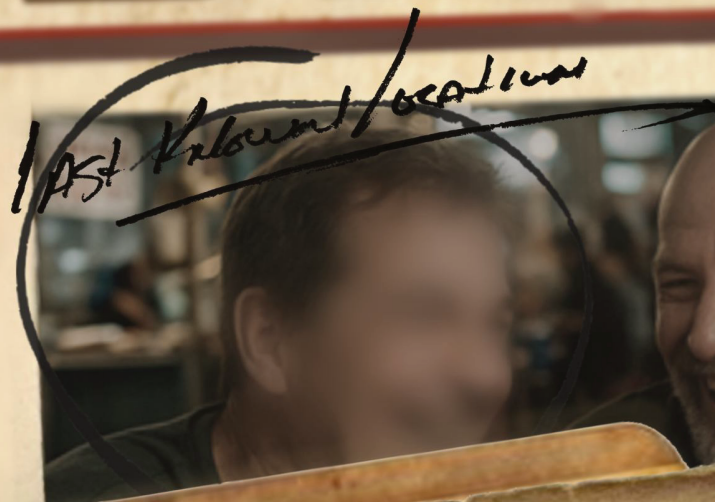
Narrated by Oscar Slamp

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SUSPECTED NARRATOR?
Oscar Slamp

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THE CURIOUS TALE OF WILLIE LYONSAN

Willie Lyonsan. A salt-of-the-earth Midwesterner. A contradiction in terms. A misfit dropped into a speck of a town in Michigan like a riddle challenged to find its own answer. Then came the fall. Tokyo. Bangkok... What starts as chaos and misdirection becomes something else entirely... A tale of divine intervention, and somehow, grace. This is more than a wildly entertaining ride; it's a deeply poetic story of redemption, soul-level love, and a life-affirming rediscovery no one saw coming.

"A masterfully written, spellbinding tale of heartache, loss, rebirth and romance that captures the soul."

-Sue T.



CHRONICLED BY

WILLIAM SNYDER

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Scene 1

The Unraveling

Stumbling recklessly down a narrow, dimly lit alleyway in Tokyo's bustling Ota Ward, not far from Haneda International Airport, Willie's vision swam with blurs and indistinct shapes. Holding his stomach, bent over in agony, his steps were unsteady, weaving a crooked path as if guided by an invisible hand. The neon colors of the night lights were softened and distorted, swirling in chaotic patterns that danced before his eyes, making it a herculean task just to put one foot in front of the other. Pedestrians eyed him with a mix of curiosity and caution, sidestepping to avoid his erratic, zigzagging progress along the sidewalk. In his clouded mind, a single thought emerged with clarity: if he could just find some cold water to pour over his head, he might regain the senses he'd lost.

With this hope, he spotted a 7-11 along his route and tumbled in, nearly falling in the process. The fluorescent lights of the store cast a harsh, sterile glow over his disheveled figure. Barely managing to maintain his balance, he hunched over like a man who had braved a tempest, each movement a betrayal of his intentions, as if the very earth conspired to trip him. He squinted through the haze, trying to fix his gaze on what he hoped was a water cooler. Yet, after only a few faltering steps inside the store, he felt the weight of curious eyes and judgmental stares upon him. He wavered like a spinning top on the verge of collapse, muttering incoherently under his breath before turning and stumbling back out into the night.

Somewhere along the bustling street between the fluorescent glow of the 7-11 and the comfort of his hotel, he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his phone and somehow managed to call his friend and neighbor, Wasum.

Though she was still cocooned in the warmth of morning sleep, the persistent ring of her phone pierced through her dreams. With a groggy sigh, she fumbled around the nightstand, finally grasping the device to see it was Willie calling. She answered.

“Willie. Are you ok?”

She could hear him attempting to speak, with city noises in the background, as he mumbled and fiddled with his phone. She couldn't decipher what he was trying to communicate. However, knowing that Willie was never too far out of control, no matter how intoxicated, Wasum quickly became alert and concentrated on the call.

“Willie. Willie! Are you there?”

She checked the app – they had programmed each other into the Find My app on their phones. She could see he was in Tokyo, a short distance from Haneda airport. She knew he was due to come home from his trip the day before, but hadn't heard from him. She figured he was in the RV sleeping off jet lag and getting reacclimated to mountain time again. She was surprised to see he was still in Japan, which heightened her concern.

“Willie! Willie! Are you there?” The phone went silent.

Wasum's older brother, Decha, who was brought up by their aunt following their father's death, worked as a cargo plane pilot under subcontract with SIAM Shipping and a few other charter companies based in Bangkok. His job involved delivering goods, and occasionally people, across Asia, and he frequently flew into Kansai, Narita, and Haneda. When she contacted him, it turned out by sheer

luck that he was on a layover in Osaka, having just completed a delivery of fresh bananas and dried mangoes to a client at Kansai International Airport.

“Wasum! What’s up, Sister?”

“You remember my friend Willie, my neighbor I told you about?”

“Yep.”

“I think he’s in big trouble in Tokyo...” she explained, telling him about the uncharacteristic phone call. “Do you have any contacts at Haneda who could check on him, or is there any way you can help?”

Decha replied, “Let me see what I can do. I might even be able to get over there. I was deadheading back but trying to find a load or a charter. I’ll make some more calls. I’ll call you back.”

Wasum checked the app again and could see Willie, or at least his phone, was at the Oriental Express Hotel, about 15-20 minutes from the airport. She texted Decha with the location. Feeling helpless, all she could do was wait.

An hour had passed and finally Decha called.

“I found a load out of Haneda with another carrier, and I’ve got a friend – a local there who’s pretty well connected in Tokyo. I scored a standby seat on the next flight over. He’s going to meet me there.”

“Oh my Buddha! Thank you, Decha.”

“I’ll call as soon as I know anything.” He replied.

Several hours went by, and it was almost 1 PM in Arizona, 5 AM in Tokyo. The app indicated that Willie was still close to or possibly inside the Oriental Express, which Wasum took as a positive sign. She knew that this was the hotel where he planned to spend the last few nights before his scheduled flight home. Just then, her phone rang.

“Decha?”

“We’re here at the hotel looking for him, *under the radar...*”

“What do you mean, *under the radar??*”

Decha replied, “Turns out my friend here knows the girl at the front desk of the hotel. She told him the police came in looking for Willie. Apparently he had stumbled into the street just down the road from here and caused a motorbike accident.”

“Well the app shows him at that hotel, is he there?”

“The lady at the front desk says she saw him about six but he hadn’t been back all night.”

“Holy shit!” Wasum said.

“Hang on, my friend just popped his head around the corner, he’s motioning for me to come over”, Decha said.

A few minutes passed. Wasum could hear shuffling footsteps and muffled voices.

“Decha, what’s going on?”

“We found him. He’s out cold. Looks pretty beat up. He’s tucked away between a cargo truck and a cement wall. You’d never see him and wouldn’t think to look for him back here.”

“Is he ok?”

“My friend is going to talk to his friend at the front desk to see if we can sneak him in the back way and get him to his room.”

“Oh my Buddha!” Wasum exhaled.

Decha’s cohort came out the back way and propped the door open, saying “He’s not even checked in here but she’s going to let us use an employee meeting room on the second floor. We’re going to get him up there on the freight elevator. She’ll keep it under wraps for now but we need to get him out of here, fast. They’ll find him eventually and probably throw him in jail.”

Decha and his contact managed to get Willie up to the meeting room and assessed the situation from there. Willie was still out cold. Once up there they could see a big red mark on the side of his face and his clothes on the same side were scuffed and dirtied. He had a rip in his shirt with a little

blood near his shoulder. They figured he hadn’t been beaten up but had more likely fallen with a hell of a dead weight thud back behind that truck.

In a determined effort to rouse him from his stupor, they called out his name with increasing urgency, their voices rising in pitch. They shook him, trying to jolt him back to awareness. When that failed, they resorted to slapping his face, the sound of skin against skin echoing in the room. Still, he remained unresponsive. Desperation mounting, they dragged him into the bathroom and sprayed him with the shower hose letting the cold water hit his face in a relentless stream. Yet, despite their efforts, he remained oblivious, his chest rising and falling steadily, as if he were merely in a deep, unreachable slumber.

Decha’s load out of Haneda back to Bangkok was scheduled to depart later that day. They figured the police would catch up to Willie before then, so they started scheming a way to sneak him out of there. All the way out. He wouldn’t be safe in Tokyo, or anywhere in Japan.

Decha called Wasum and brought her up to speed.

“He’s still out, and the police are bound to be closing in on him. We’ve got to get him out of town.”

Wasum questioned, “Out of town?”

“Yes, out of town, out of Tokyo, out of Japan!” They’ll throw the book at him if they catch up to him. The Japanese don’t take kindly to Foreigners causing trouble over here. We found out one of the people on the motorbike, a local, had to go to the hospital after the wreck he caused.”

“So what do we do? How the hell are you going to get him out of there?”

“I’ve got to somehow get him on that plane with me back to Bangkok. Once we’re back on Thailand soil, everything gets easier.”

"Ohhhhhhh," Willie groaned.

"That's a promising sign," Decha remarked. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes, I did," Wasum responded, while typing away on her laptop, attempting to reschedule a trip to Bangkok she had originally planned for February to an earlier date. "What about Thanaporn? Could she assist?"

Thanaporn was Decha and Wasum’s cousin. She’s a manager at a third-party contractor office in Bangkok that handles immigration and visa paperwork.

Decha and Wasum hail from a well-connected, affluent family with ties to the monarchy. Their family is well-known and influential enough to pull off a rescue plan in Thailand that could succeed, provided they managed to

get Willie on that plane and out of Japan. So, they began plotting their strategy together.

Decha’s contact was still in play, fascinated by the whole sordid affair. He would be instrumental in getting Willie to the plane. Once airborne, they’d be in the clear. All they needed was a convincing enough story and some paperwork that looked legitimate to fool a couple of lower-level security guards at BKK. They wouldn’t have to deal with customs, just get past the gate guard – who would likely be known to Decha and relatively easy to deceive.

Willie, now barely aware of his surroundings, sees a man talking on a phone, his voice muted from the thunderous buzzing in his head. He barely made out...“Ok, you get a hold of Thanaporn. Have her put toge...” before it faded out completely as the man walked away towards the door to let someone in. Willie faded to black again.

Another few hours vanished. The front desk lady alerted Decha’s connection that the police were checking all the hotels and were closing in. They were ready for the escape.

Straining to piece together fragments of his memory, Willie was now being partly dragged, partly walked out of the meeting room by two unfamiliar men. They guided him down the hallway. He was clueless about both what had

transpired, and where he was being taken. One man loosened his grip with one hand while still holding firmly onto Willie's elbow with the other. He opened an old wooden hoistway door, and they entered a large freight elevator. Willie sensed they were descending. The elevator came to a stop, and they swiftly moved through a dimly lit corridor to a set of double doors. The light was blinding and disorienting as they passed through. A four-door truck awaited them, with a third man in the driver's seat. Willie and the two men holding him got into the back seat, and the truck sped off. The driver handed a legal-sized envelope and a small black travel bag to Decha. The man took some papers out of the envelope, glanced through them, muttered a few words in what might have been Japanese, and then placed the envelope into the bag.

The side of Willie's face was starting to throb by this time. He caught a glimpse of himself in the window as they approached the truck. He could see a bruise. He could feel the swelling. He had shooting pain in his right shoulder, ribs and hip.

Am I being abducted? he thought to himself.

Silence weighed heavily inside the truck, a tense quiet that seemed to amplify every bump and jolt. The driver maneuvered through the city streets with a relentless

precision, as if on a mission handed down straight from the gods. Suddenly, they halted. Willie, trapped in a haze of disorientation and nausea, slipped back into a fog of semi-awareness. The vehicle's movements tossed him about, and the muffled drone of voices barely penetrated his consciousness before he slipped back into a void of oblivion.

Decha's contact vaulted into the front seat, leaving Decha and Willie in the back as they turned into the employee section of TIACT No. 1 International Cargo Building. The driver was a close ally of Decha's contact and held a senior position at the airport. With a swift, purposeful maneuver and a few waves to co-workers manning checkpoints along the way, he had whisked them all through the gate, navigating the facility's labyrinthine security with seamless precision. His mission: to deliver Decha to the prep area for the flight back to Bangkok, a delivery he had secured during his layover at Kansai.

"We've got 90 minutes before take-off. I need to do my prep," Decha stated, his voice steely with urgency. "Can you guys get Willie ... *End of Dispatch Preview.*

To continue the journey, the complete edition of The Road Here is available directly from The Border Dispatch.